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A NEW AND BROADER INTERPRETATION OF THE

IDEALITY OF AENEAS (Hritzu)

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE ILIAD (Howland)



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Edward H. Heffner, Editor, Bennett Hall, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia 4, Pennsylvania.

Franklin B. Krauss, Secretary and Treasurer, The Pennsylvania State College, Box 339, State College, Pennsylvania.

Associate Editor, Wm. C. McDermott; Contributing Editors: Charles T. Murphy, J. C. Plumpe, Bluma L. Trell.

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A NEW AND BROADER INTERPRETATION OF THE IDEALITY OF AENAEAS

Many are Aeneas' acclaimers; many are his detractors.¹ Among the detractors as well as among the acclaimers, we find represented the extreme in enthusiasm and conservatism. The enthusiasts among the acclaimers admit outright without hesitation the lofty degree of ideality in the character of Aeneas; the conservatives, on the other hand, are less enthusiastic in their appraisal and recognize in Aeneas, yes, an ideal, but not so much a possible universal ideal as merely a local hero. The enthusiasts among the detractors condemn Aeneas with as complete a finality as the acclaimers praise him and not only deny him ideality but even regard him as unsuited for the role of a hero in an epic; the conservatives, on the other hand, like the conservative acclaimers, recognize the nobleness of Aeneas but see in him more of the ordinary than of the ideal. What is the reason for this variety and for this difference of opinion between and among the acclaimers and detractors? Why should the interpretation of the character of Aeneas produce so many divergent opinions? It is my personal opinion² that the conservative and enthusiastic degrees of praise and censure, respectively, are conclusions unwarranted in the light of an abundance of actual and factual evidence. It is my personal opinion that Aeneas' detractors—whether wittingly, or not, I know not—have not sifted carefully and analytically all of the evidence available in interpreting and evaluating Aeneas' character and that they have arrived in their conclusions at a narrow interpretation of the ideality of Aeneas' character.

The reason for this utter disagreement of opinion and narrow interpretation is the failure to penetrate beneath the superficial and narrow philosophy of the Aeneid and to appreciate in the expressed words and actions of Aeneas a possible deeper purpose and value and meaning. It is true that the purpose of the Aeneid can be viewed as a personal and a local one, a purpose which has as its central point of interest the praise and glory

of Rome and of Augustus. If one does not see beyond the personal and the local meaning and application of the philosophy of the Aeneid, then to him, Aeneas, the embodiment of the epic's philosophy, assumes, as any hero must in any story, the role no greater than that of a localized hero. As in the case of the hometown hero, all glory and honor become soon identified not with the hero but with the locality. Hence it is that critics have claimed as the primary, and even as the sole purpose of the Aeneid, the glorification of Rome and Augustus. But, it is surely the presence of a philosophy more profound than that of personal glorification of the fatherland that has kept alive the great epic of Vergil for 2,000 years. It is surely the presence of a philosophy that serves as a mirror of reflection for and of the generalized ideal that has gained for the Aeneid a place next to that of the Bible.³ The Aeneid not only represents the thought and character of the educated Roman at his best,⁴ but, what is of greater importance, it contains sayings and represents actions that are valid beyond the particular hour and circumstance of their day,⁵ prophecies that re-echo from the door of eternity whence they draw their breath.⁶

Vergil's Aeneas is not the representation of absolute perfection or ideality; to claim so lofty a distinction for Vergil would be more difficult than to steal his club from Hercules. Vergil's Aeneas represents at best relative perfection, a perfection that looks, however, not only to the Roman past and present but almost prophetically to the Christian future. The ideality in the character of Aeneas does not refer to the abstract conception of the ideal man; rather, it refers to a relatively advanced development and maturity which are attained and are attainable through mastery over will, emotions, thoughts, and actions. That, it seems to me, is the deeper and broader and implied philosophy of life that can be recognized to be embodied in the Aeneid, a philosophy that teaches man that the imperfections of his weaknesses can be perfected, that the impurities of his character can be purified, even like those of gold,

in the cleansing fires of sufferings, of buffetings, of temptations. To any sincere appraiser, possessing such a philosophy as a background, it will be obvious, I should think, that there is perfection and ideality, albeit relative, in the character of Aeneas; that this relative perfection is of such a nature that it can represent a pattern of ideality not only for a Roman but for man in general. After all, it is this note of universality that makes a Classic a Classic; it is this note in any composition of high art which allows a broad, all-comprehensive portrayal of the life of man, which at some point or other touches the experiences of all men. Thus high art is the story of man, not of a man; thus the story of the Aeneid is a story of man, not merely of Aeneas, the Roman.

The purpose, consequently, of this article is three fold: first, to show that the Aeneid is an analysis of the development of the religious experiences and of the philosophy of the Romans, from the old-Roman philosophy to what we may call a new-Roman philosophy; second, to explain how the story of Aeneas can be read, with certain limitations, as the story of the development of man toward ideality, albeit relative, an ideality that is the result of this development of religious experiences and philosophy; third, to indicate how, in its final stages of development, the character of Aeneas assumes such a noble quality that it not only represents an ideal combination of the old and the new Roman ideality, but that it portrays, in wondrous wise, the characteristics of universal ideality.⁷

Upon close observation one cannot help but feel that there is a definite difference in degree between the philosophy expressed in the earlier portions of the Aeneid and that expressed in the latter; that there is a marked difference in degree in the ethical and social conduct of Aeneas before and after his arrival in Italy. The fact that some cannot see a definite difference in the conduct of Aeneas does not mean that there is no difference. Some writers, although they cannot appreciate this difference completely, nevertheless, in analyzing the story of Aeneas, emphatically indicate the presence of this difference.⁸ I admire the utterance of Mr. Howe relative to the point at issue which reminds us that the trait and qualities in the later man (i.e. Aeneas) are the *developed* traits and qualities of the earlier man.⁹ It would seem that Vergil, the adventist pagan, who in the last hour before the fullness of time, fulfilled the measure of what was good in ancient paganism as others had fulfilled the measure of its evil,¹⁰ had become aware, intuitively, of the limited application of the old Roman pietas as he traced with keen religious insight the spiritual progress of Aeneas in his journey from Troy to Italy; it would seem that Vergil, realizing through the gift of Divine Providence the logical consequences of the religious fostering of the old Roman pietas, created for us, as well as for the Romans, an

ideal who is more than an old Roman ideal, an ideal, who, although he is not yet synonymous, in all details, with the full-grown universal ideal, is, nevertheless, an authentic prototype of him, even though his every characteristic is not yet completely polished in every respect. It is true that the spiritual maturity as represented in Aeneas is only relative perfection, that in comparison with the full-grown flower of the rose of the ideality that was to bloom in the following centuries, it is little more than the flower in the bud. It seems to be, nevertheless, a flower of the same scent, a rose of the same species.

Nearly every edition of Vergil's Aeneid contains in its Introduction the story of Vergil's desire, shortly before his death, of burning his manuscript of the Aeneid on the grounds of its imperfect condition. Why must this story refer, necessarily, to the external incompleteness of the story of the Aeneid? Why can it not refer just as logically to the internal incompleteness of the philosophy of the epic? Vergil was a great mind. He had studied carefully, no doubt, all of the fine religious experiences and philosophical expressions of his beloved Romans. He was striving to leave behind a synthesis of the mellowed Roman religious and philosophical expressions; he was trying to give to the Romans the best that they had achieved in the form of a religious 'bible'; he was trying to set before their eyes virtues that made a man noble. It seems to me, therefore, to be an act of injustice to assign as the reason for Vergil's disappointment over his Aeneid the minor consideration of poetic inaccuracies. Every nation, it seems, is endowed with a gifted prophet who may serve as the national mouthpiece for the pronouncement of its highest philosophical expression, an expression, which, like the individual rivers of the world, tend inevitably towards and serve to complete the universal ocean of truth. Vergil is the prophetic mouthpiece of Rome.¹¹ 'Vergil is one of those persons that nature creates in only her amazing moods, when she wishes to give to the world heroic figures of commanding grace and thought to lead the race to higher levels.'¹²

Some of the great virtues even of Christianity seem to be admirably foreshadowed by Aeneas in his relationships with his gods, his fellow men and his enemies. On closer observation it almost seems that the pietas of the new Roman philosophy with its implications as represented by Aeneas does, in a limited sense, evince characteristics of the caritas of Christianity. The pietas of the new Roman religion, in its final stages, embraced the fulfillment of duties towards the Gods, towards one's fellow men, towards one's self in a rather ideal fashion. The Christian caritas seems to be the logical outcome of the religious and philosophical fostering of the virtue of the pietas of the new Roman religious ex-

periences. One is almost tempted to wish to see the parallel between this developed idea of *pietas* of the new Roman religion and the *caritas* of the Christian religion, which advocated love of God and love of neighbor as yourself.

Scholars and Vergilian critics have been asking each other for some time the following questions relative to a study of the ideality of the character of Aeneas: Is the character of Aeneas static or developing? Does the character of Aeneas change and grow, as a result, in perfection throughout the *Aeneid*? These questions and others similar to them cannot be answered and will never be answered adequately unless and until some agreement is reached as to the meaning of the expression 'character development.' If change and growth of character mean a change and growth in *kind* only, then we must admit that there is no real appreciable change and growth in the character of Aeneas. But if change and growth refer to a change and growth in *degree*, from the ordinary to the extraordinary, from the less to the more perfect, then we must admit, it seems to me, that there is a definite change, a definite development in the character of Aeneas.

In the case of Aeneas, change and development of character cannot refer to kind, only, because Aeneas is the same kind of man after he has accomplished his mission in Italy as he was before the Greeks made their attack on Troy. The story of Aeneas is the story of a good man who becomes a better kind of man. That is the meaning of character development—development from good to better. Aeneas is *pious* from the outset. Many writers in their essays dealing with the development of the character of Aeneas start at the wrong place for their evidence. They are misled by the *ordo praeposterus* of Books One and Two of the epic. When we see Aeneas in Book One for the first time he has already completed half of his journey from Troy to Italy; he has already undergone many a hardship; he has already fulfilled dutifully many of his religious, social, and fraternal duties. The first mention of Aeneas in Book One finds him, after a hard struggle with a severe storm, giving expression to one of his moral weaknesses, that of despair and fear. This incident of the expression of weakness cannot be examined in isolation apart from the sequence of events that have preceded it. It is unfortunate because of the effect it has had on the value of critical articles treating of the character of Aeneas that the *Aeneid* should present Aeneas, inopportunely, in such a glamorless light. For a true and correct evaluation of the merits of the character of Aeneas, from a true and correct perspective, one must begin with Book Two, which is the logical place for the beginning of the story of the development of the character of Aeneas.¹³

Aeneas has been described at the beginning of the

struggle at Troy as nothing more than one of the prominent defenders of the city, as a fearless patriotic soldier caught in a desperate fight, as one with no real marks of leadership, as one uncertain and aimless in his actions.¹⁴ No mention, however, is made of that quality which is the fountain-head of character development and which acts as the barometer not only of Aeneas' but of any man's greatness—the quality of *pietas*. Should not a man who has discharged faithfully and charitably his duties towards his family, his friends, his gods, even in the face of certain danger to his own life, deserve more recognition than that bestowed upon him when described at Troy? Why does Vergil at the very outset present Aeneas as a *pious* man? It is, undoubtedly for no other reason but that he will have us know that Aeneas possessed the qualities summed up in *pietas*. He is preparing us for the story of the epic struggle of a good man with the forces of evil. The implications are obvious. It is a matter of ordinary justice for an impious man to suffer the consequences of evil; but, for a *pious* man to endure the anger, the jealousy, the abuses of gods and goddesses, for apparently, no other reason except that he is *pious*, is a riddle for Vergil, just as it is for us, unsolvable without the assistance and the consolation of faith. *Pietas* constitutes the sum total of all the moral, spiritual, and religious worth that formed, once upon a time, the bulwark of Roman strength and greatness. *Pietas*, or devotion to duty, is the keynote to the interpretation of Aeneas' character; and devotion to duty is also the keynote to the interpretation of the character of any man of the past, the present, and the future. Aeneas' detractors recognize the virtue of *pietas* in his character only to utilize the admission later as an argument against character development and ideality. From outward appearances, since Aeneas is *pious* when he starts his mission and remains *pious* throughout the fulfillment of that mission, it would seem that Aeneas' detractors are justified in condemning him as a static personality, as a character who fails to change and develop towards ideality. This conclusion would be tenable were it not for the fallacious premise of the meaning of character development. Character development, as we have already mentioned, should mean more than a change from one kind to another, from sin to virtue, and vice versa. Development and change are not synonymous.

Change is essential and necessary; but it must be one of progressive betterment. This progressive betterment constitutes the higher type of character development, a development in degree from a lower to a higher point of perfection, from the virtuous to the more virtuous.

That is the internal philosophical meaning of character development; it is the process of making more perfect the sum total of all moral, spiritual, religious, social inclinations, and aspirations. The loftier the development, the loftier the ideal. Ideality implies progressive

change; static personality, therefore, can never become ideal.

Aeneas' pilgrimage from Troy to Italy can be interpreted as the pilgrimage of man from spiritual goodness to spiritual betterment; as the story of man perfecting his charity in the discharge of duties towards the state and his fellow men; as the story of man gaining moral strength to perform good and avoid evil; as the story of the hardening of man into an ideal character;¹⁵ as the story of the problem of good and evil, or more appropriately, the struggle of good with evil.

Heinze was apparently the first Vergilian scholar to recognize the deep religious and philosophical motive of the Aeneid when he pointed out that the Aeneid was the presentation of the development of the idealization of man in the light of the philosophical concept that man grows to the ideal through the endurance of and the victory over the buffetings of fortune. No man is born an ideal; he must attain ideality through development, through moral experiences, through moral victories over self and human weaknesses. That was the road of experience that Aeneas traveled in the fulfillment of his mission, as he progressed to the attainment of the idealization of his ideal capacities. In the beginning, Aeneas is called by Vergil 'virum pietate insignem';¹⁶ at the completion of his mission, he is regarded as one 'deberi caelo'.¹⁷ It is true that under the continual buffetings of the forces of fate and circumstances, Aeneas falters and stumbles; but, he rises again and advances forward, stronger after than before his experiences. Only after the inner experiences of the soul have triumphed, through conviction and labor, over the external forces of environment and temptations, only after a man has lived through, with moral and spiritual success, his period of trial, can he be admitted into the company of the gods as the ideal king of men.

Aeneas faced temptations and obstacles before his arrival in Italy; he met them and overcame them as well as any Roman could, guided by the light of the principles of the old Roman philosophy. After his arrival in Italy, Aeneas had to face other temptations and difficulties; but, he seems to have met and to have overcome them in the manner of one guided by the light of a more perfect philosophy—the philosophy which we must call the new Roman philosophy, a philosophy similar to, but as yet not identical with the more ideal philosophy that was to dawn shortly after the death of Vergil. It has been stated that, in the Aeneid Vergil looks forward as well as backward; that the religious belief of Vergil in its deepest intuition seems to look forward to the belief which became prominent in Rome four centuries later.¹⁸ It seems logical, therefore, to conclude that in the earlier portion of the Aeneid, Vergil, in retrospection, is revealing the theory

and practice of the ideal of the old Roman philosophy; that in the later section, he is, in prospect, unravelling the story of the theory and the practice of the ideal of the new Roman philosophy—the pre-Christian concept of the practicality of the ideal.¹⁹

Scholars have assumed that Aeneas reaches his full ethical and moral stature within the earlier portions of the Aeneid. Aeneas does reach a maturity, it is true, in fulfilling the duties of pietas—but only in the light of the principle of the old Roman concept of pietas. In the light of the new Roman philosophy, Aeneas does not reach spiritual maturity until he has fulfilled his mission in Italy. The old Roman philosophy, like the new, did recognize religiously the three-fold duties and their fulfillment towards deity, state, and fellow man. In the understanding, however of the last of these three duties—that of love of fellow man—the old Roman philosophy was gravely narrow.

It was relatively easy for Aeneas, imbued with the spirit of charity and with the spirit of the loving fulfillment of duties, to discharge those duties towards his native friends. His expression in the earlier books of kindness, of love, of solicitude, of compassion, of magnanimity, of affection, of sympathy, was, for the most part, directed towards his native friends. The real meaning and value, however, of the philosophy of pietas was to be tested and proven in the fulfillment of these same duties towards the enemy and the foreigner, i.e., non-Romans. One might well argue that it was the principle of diplomacy or of personal advantage that prompted Aeneas to solicit and accept the friendship of Evander and his people, who were, in lineage, descendants of the same race as those Greeks who had attacked Aeneas and his followers at Troy.²⁰ That argument must concede by its relative jejuneness to the argument that assigns to Aeneas, a man born ahead of his times, morally and spiritually, the realization of the brotherhood of mankind, the realization of the equality of all human beings in the eyes of divine justice, the realization of the ultimate descent of all men from one common stock. Aeneas' alliance with Evander was more than one of, and for, military improvement. It was not the fear of the enemy that joined Greek with Trojan, the foreigner with the native, the enemy with the friend, but rather as Vergil would have it, 'virtue and the holy oracles of the gods and a related parentage'.²¹ The ultimate source of human generation, of friends as well as of foe, is the same, for, as Aeneas remarks, 'genus amborum scindit se sanguine ab uno'.²² The Greek and the Trojan alliance was, in effect, the prefiguration of the effect of the philosophy of the approaching new world which was to unite the force of the good in a common cause against the force of the

evil. It is in the later books of the *Aeneid* that Vergil seems to approach the threshold of the temple of universal truth, when with religious intuition bordering on the prophetic he clothes Aeneas in the new garment of the new Roman man, refashioned in the light of the principle of an all embracing love of mankind. The old Roman ideal did not see clearly beyond his immediate circle of Roman friendship. His principle of friendship was correct within its narrow confines; for he loved his friends. But in the application of the term 'friend' he erred gravely. He loved his friends with an ardent love. One has only to collect his thoughts about the meaning of the Roman institution *hospitium* to appreciate the Roman idea of friendly love. The Romans were able to love their neighbors and their friends as ardently as any disciple of the new dispensation of the Christian philosophy. Their error was not in the concept of love but in that of the term 'neighbor.' To a Roman, the term 'neighbor' had a local, not an universal significance. Anyone residing without the geographical and ethnological limits of the Roman Empire was not thought of as a friend or as a neighbor. Such an outcast was designated as a foreigner; therefore, as an enemy. The theory of neighborly love was intelligible to the old Romans only in its local, not in its universal application. Among the Romans, it was deemed a crime of the first magnitude, if any harm were allowed to befall either a guest in the house or a friend. Even among the savages, the principle of neighborly love was, presumably, rigorously observed. Its application, as among the Romans, was local.

In the Christian philosophy the circle of friends is all inclusive. There exists no one beyond its periphery; there are no outsiders and there can be no outsiders. Neighborly love extends beyond and includes the limits of all tribes, of all races, of all nations. The law of the old Roman philosophy had said: Love thy friends (and by implication, hate thine enemies); the law of the new Roman philosophy, by enlarging the extent of the circle of friends, was teaching, like the succeeding Christian philosophy, the love of enemies. Like the Christian philosophy, the new Roman philosophy was placing a great and new emphasis on social morality; it was teaching brotherly love; it was unteaching the old doctrine of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; it was proclaiming the golden rule of doing unto others what was expected to be done to oneself.

Aeneas' character, therefore, must reach its full stature within the limits of the later books, where we have a presentation of the new Roman philosophy. It is true that in Book Two, Aeneas does manifest the spirit of brotherly love in befriending the false Sinon;²³ that in Book Three, Aeneas again reveals his spirit of magnanimity, when he offers compassion to the lost Greek found on the island of the Cyclops.²⁴ In these instances, however, although the spirit of brotherly love

is similar in kind to that expressed in the later books of the *Aeneid*, nevertheless, there is between them a marked difference in degree.

Let us now, first, review some of the deeds and actions of Aeneas as we find them recorded in the later books; let us, then examine them in the light of the principle of the new Roman ideal and attempt to evaluate the evidence as a contribution to the sum total of the qualities that enhance the development of Aeneas as the ideal not only of Rome, but with limitations, of mankind.

In Book Ten, Aeneas exemplifies his magnitude of charitable spirit towards his enemy in his refusal to dishonor and to disgrace even the dead body of slain Lausus, the son of Mezentius,²⁵ his arch enemy. He may well have denied this illustrious son the due honor of a hero's burial. Unlike the Romans of the old dispensation, Aeneas not only orders that the body be sent back amid due reverence, but he, king though he was, with the gesture of exceptional tenderness deigns to assist in raising the body from the gory mud and even to set in place the disheveled and gore-stained locks of hair of the dead man. Did enemy treat enemy in like fashion before?

In Book Twelve, the expression of Aeneas' charity reaches an almost ideal height even amid the warmth and anger of war, when Aeneas becomes compassionate at the sight of Turnus, the cause of the misfortune to the Latins, grovelling, defenseless in the dirt before his very feet.²⁶

The loftiest expression of Aeneas' charity towards his enemies occurs in Book Twelve, when he makes the announcement that as victor and conqueror he will not overwhelm the conquered in subjection and slavery but will allow them to live as equals among equals, in peace and in justice.²⁷ It is the height of magnanimity and of charity on the part of a conqueror to raise the conquered to the level of the conquerors and to treat them not as slaves but as equals. The enunciation of this principle of equality and of justice by Aeneas foreshadows the future emancipation proclamations of the new dispensation of the Christian philosophy of the equality of man.

(to be concluded)

NOTES

Editor's Note—Portions of the material of this article appeared in an earlier Number. Our readers will be delighted to have a fuller treatise of this topic.

¹Consult the following works for the character of Aeneas: Howe, G., *Development of the Character of Aeneas*, CJ 26. 180-193; Slaughter, M. S., *Vergil: an Interpretation*, CJ 12.359-377; DeWitt, Norman W., *Vergil's Detractors*, CJ 25.662-670; Haecker, T., *Vergil, Father of the West*, trans. by A. W. Wheen, London, Sheed and Ward, 1934; Harper's *Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities*, s.v. Vergilius.

²I have classified very carefully the actions of Aeneas under the headings of moral strength and moral weakness, or virtues and vicia, respectively. In the first group are listed virtues which are manifested more frequently in the actions of Aeneas: religious duty, filial love, parental love, conjugal love, compassion, sympathy, aspirations for peace; and others that are less prevalent, such as humility, solicitude, courtesy, gratitude, kindness, cheerfulness, disdain for war. In the second group of faults, I have tabulated the following as appearing more frequently: anger, fear, taunt; and others appearing less frequently, such as rebuke, boastfulness, impatience, loss of temper, contempt.

³On the question of the distinction enjoyed by the Aeneid of ranking second to the Bible in popularity throughout the ages, see especially, Haecker, page 66, and the edition of Vergil by Fairclough and Brown, *Introd.* p. XXIX, (Sanborn & Co., 1925).

⁴Cf. Bailey, C., *The Mind of Rome*, p. 23 (Oxford, 1926).

⁵I have found in an old edition of Vergil, a section of an old paper containing an article entitled 'Vergil, the Best-Loved Poet' written by a certain George E. Woodberry. The article is interesting for the ideas it contains concerning certain aspects of Aeneas' character and the universality of the Aeneid. It is worth noting Woodberry's idea of the universality of the Aeneid: 'The Aeneid, Vergil's last and greatest work, is a world-poem; ... of all epic poets (he was) the nearest to all nations.'

⁶Haecker 77-78.

⁷Notice the following relevant statements taken from Norman W. DeWitt's article, *Vergil and Apocalyptic Literature*, CJ 13.600-606: 'Vergil alone has caught the gleam of the Holy Grail'; 'The Aeneid itself is the Messianic Eclogue drawn to a large scale'; 'Vergil was in real truth the prophet of the gentiles.'

⁸Frank Miller in his article, *Vergil's Motivation of the Aeneid*, CJ 24.28-44 divides the epic of Vergil ingeniously into two Aeneids, as he calls it, the Aeneid of wandering and the Aeneid of conquest. Rand in *Vergil's Magical Art* also divides the Aeneid according to its subject matter, and he, too, curiously enough labels the latter book as conquest. Would it not seem that these two scholars recognize in the story of Aeneas something more than a mere arrival at a geographical and material destination?

⁹Howe 191.

¹⁰Haecker 14.

¹¹Miller in *Vergil's Motivation of the Aeneid*, CJ 24.28 prefers to call Vergil the half-prophet; but, nevertheless, he does recognize him as a *prophet*.

¹²Mackail, J. W., *Vergil and his Meaning to the World of Today*, Preface p. vi (Boston, Marshall Jones Co., 1922).

¹³'In the Second Book,' states Miller in his article, p. 32, 'we have the logical beginning of the story.'

¹⁴Cf. Howe 185.

¹⁵Cf. Henle, R. J., *The Philosophy of Vergil*, CR, vol. 13.26.

¹⁶Aen., 1.10.

¹⁷Ibid. 12.795.

¹⁸Cf. Sellar, *Roman Poets of the Republic*, p. 371 (Oxford, 1925).

¹⁹Woodberry also appreciates Vergil's prophetic intuition, when he says: 'The world was ready to be re-born; there is no break; the premonitions of Christian feeling are natural to Vergil.'

²⁰Cf. Miller's relevant statement on this subject in his article, p. 39: 'This narrative (i.e., the story of Evander and Aeneas) emphasizes the close relations destined to exist between the Greek and Roman elements in the nation as he knew it.'

²¹Aen. 8.131-133.

²²Ibid. 8.142.

²³Ibid. 2.57 foll.

²⁴Ibid. 3.588 foll.

²⁵Ibid. 10.825-832.

²⁶Ibid. 12.938-941.

²⁷Ibid. 12.187-191.

JOHN N. HRITZU

COLLEGE OF SAINT TERESA

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE ILIAD

Mme Rachael Bespaloff, in a recent book (*De l'Iliade, par Rachel Bespaloff, Brentano, 1943*), acclaim the Iliad as one of the two supreme productions of human genius (the other, in her opinion, being the Bible). Without delving into Mme Bespaloff's ideas, which are interesting, if perhaps a trifle on the sentimental side, it might be well to ask whether a poem which has come down to us across so many centuries has any lesson for the man of today.

Of course the Iliad would not be the great poem that it is if it did not yield innumerable incidental applications, especially in this war-battered age of ours. Quotation is easy. On any shore you please there may be a man standing now, and waiting for the ship that shall carry him home, even though there be no goddess-mother to rise from the depths and comfort him. And there is Thetis herself! Too many mothers, alas, have known her despairing cry. As for married life, hear Andromache's utterance, with its connotation of indissoluble union and forgetfulness of all past ties. Not to speak of that divine picture of the Shield (perhaps the most magical passage in all literature), which ostensibly only the description of a world at peace, is really the poet's vision of the Promised Land, that far country which no man has visited but from which some of us, perhaps, may have caught an echo in our dreams. And so on; the list is endless.

But there is one theme, which runs like a dark river behind all the narrative, behind the clash and fanfare of battle and the parleying of gods and kings. That is the Homeric theology.

What a gloomy theology it is! What a Hereafter! Here are no golden streets, no harps, no feasting, waiting for us across the Styx—only a dim, anemic half-existence, through which furtive shapes flit despair-

ingly, sundered forever from the sunlight. The soul, flying from the fallen warrior's body, weeps as it flies, lamenting that it must abandon so much youth and courage. Achilles would rather work as a hired man for the poorest farmer above ground than be a king beneath it. Odysseus' mother, instead of resting from care, has known only grief at the separation from her beloved son.

A strange creed, you will say, for men to cling to. To us moderns, for whom religion means a system of rewards and punishments, it seems incredible. The Homeric theology offered no rewards; it was under no illusion about virtue's being profitable, either now or hereafter. You did your duty because it was the right thing to do and because you believed in giving a good account of yourself. But there was no advantage in it. There was no good but the present—the sunlight and the warm earth and the prow that slips rustling through the wine-dark waters. And, mind you, the Homeric warrior had none of the modern materialist's faith in endless sleep after death, for such comfort as it might have brought him. Consciousness persisted, but it was the consciousness of impotence. You lived, in the afterworld, only to long for a fuller life. How could men believe such things?

The answer is that they did—and, believing them, they wrote the *Iliad*. The mind turns to another flowering of human genius, when men held not dissimilar beliefs. The men of the Renaissance were pagan, too. Not officially, of course. They had replaced Apollo and Athene by St. George and the Blessed Virgin, and many of them, no doubt, looked to a reward for righteous living. But they did not confound virtue with happiness, and they were more interested in splendid failure than in smug success. Or even just failure, by itself. Take Falstaff. By all modern standards, Falstaff is the most obstreperous failure that ever walked out of life into a book. Yet he is his creator's favorite character; the only one who took two whole plays to do him justice. And Don Quixote! Who would not turn with contempt from the doddering old imbecile, with his windmill giants and princesses in fustian? Well, the Mad Knight lives, in the same company with Falstaff and Achilles. There is no suggestion that he went to Heaven, any more than Patroclus. Is there something here, then, that human nature clings to?

I believe there is. I believe (and so, of course do many other persons) that modern religions have gone astray on this point. Without belittling the loftiness of the Christian ethic, for example, one may question whether its perpetual harping on rewards and punishments is psychologically sound. It tends to encourage the illusion, Be good and you will be happy. Ah, says

the Church, but my rewards are purely spiritual; they do not apply to this life. No doubt; but it is an ancient tendency of human nature to associate righteousness with prosperity and ill-luck with sin, as Job's friends did. One cannot blame a man if, being promised a reward hereafter, he tries to anticipate a little. And so, merit being linked with earthly goods, prosperity becomes a virtue, and we have our success stories and our Hollywood happy endings. But we write no more *Iliads*.

So what? says Homo Sapiens. Are we not wonderful creatures? Have we not built great cities, accumulated vast stores of wealth? Have we not just displayed prodigies of valor, and ingenuity, and endurance, in winning the greatest war in history and discomfiting all our enemies? Would you have us imitate the Homeric Greeks, with their absurd ideas about gods (instead of electrons) sitting on Mount Olympus, and their perpetual fighting about—about—

About what? Why, about prestige, I suppose, and commerce, and frontiers, and strategic islands. In short, the very things we fight about today. And their religion, judged by its results, was it lower than ours? At least, the Homeric Greeks were emotionally mature, as we are not. They had to be, to write the *Iliad*. Yes, you will say, but the *Iliad* was written for aristocrats. Show me where the common people appear. Well, they appear here and there. For example, the simile of the poor widow weighing her miserable output of wool. There is the lame woman, grinding late at night in the house of Odysseus, and lifting up her voice to curse the suitors. But let us grant that the personages, on the surface, are aristocrats; still they are above and beyond all class. Hector and Andromache and their baby you may meet, I trust, in more than one modern household, whether in San Francisco or Leningrad or Caracas; and no man, rich or poor, who ever owned a dog can read with dry eyes the story of Argus. Homer's people are of our time as they are of all time. Can we not learn from them?

Yes, we can. We can learn to admire failure, as they did and as the Elizabethans did. We can learn to stop judging everything by size and wealth, and to stand up with dignity before the world, whether we are drawing a big salary or not. We can learn to think.

And will that do us any good? Probably not. For time is passing, and there is a lengthening shadow across our path. Humanity stands like Hector at the Scaean gate, and yonder approaching figure, bright with death, bears more and more the likeness of the atomic bomb.

GUY M. HOWLAND

ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA